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# INFORMATION REPORT

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SUPPLEMENT TO REPORT NO. 25X1X

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## Attitude of the Laos toward the Viet Minh

1. The Lao population is increasingly concerned by the formation of joint Lao-Viet Minh guerrilla units which are now active throughout Laos. Some residents of Vientiane are preparing to evacuate to the Nongkai and Nakhon Phanom districts of Thailand because of the intensified guerrilla activity.
2. The majority of Laos believe that the French as well as Lao officials of the French-supported Vientiane government will abandon Laos in the event of a large-scale Viet Minh attack. They believe that even the troops of the Foreign Legion, despite their boastful attitude, would not remain to defend the country. Among the current stories of low French morale circulating in the coffee houses is that of a French soldier who deserted his unit in Vientiane on 17 January 1951 and crossed the Mekong River into Thailand. The soldier was killed by French military police machine gun fire near the river bank.\* Such incidents have been responsible for the feeling of panic among the people.

### Political Situation

3. The Lao Union Party, led by Sao Song, is the declared opposition party in the Vientiane Government. Although the party advocates cooperation with the Viet Minh, their program seeks to secure Lao freedom by constitutional means. Many Laos believe, however, that the group will join the Viet Minh if Ho Chi Minh succeeds in obtaining control of the country.
4. The Vientiane Government has ordered the arrest of several members of the Lao Union Party on charges of being in contact with the Viet Minh. Tao Neth Pone Fridge, a deputy iron chieftain and a member of the Lao Union Party, has been arrested on charges of opposing the formation of the Lao National Army, of failing to support the military budget and of being pro-Viet Minh. Tao Neth will be taken to Saigon.
5. The events leading to Tao Neth's arrest typify the political disunity among the various political groups in Laos. The first Free Lao organization was formed at the end of World War II under Phya Khamao. Following the French reoccupation of Indochina, Phya Khamao, Prince Patcharat, Prince Souvanapouma,

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and Prince Souphanavong established a Free Lao Government in Bangkok. At this time, Tao Neth joined the French and was responsible for the arrest and death of a number of Free Lao followers of Phya Khammao still living in Laos. The Free Lao Government in Bangkok eventually split into several factions. One group, including Phya Khammao, Prince Souvanapouma and Prince Sukand joined the French-supported Vientiane Government under Pui Banya. These men, more or less figureheads of the Lao Progressive Party, nevertheless occupied important positions in the Government, Souvanapouma in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Sukand as Deputy Director of the Lao police. It is generally believed that this group denounced Tao Neth to the French, because of his betrayal of Free Laos to the French at the end of the war.

#### Viet Minh-Supported Lao Government

6. The Viet Minh broadcast from Tonkin, announcing the formation of a joint Viet Minh-Lao United Front was heard in Laos. The Lao population is therefore generally aware of the formation of a cabinet under Prince Souphanavong.\*\* It appears possible that the Souphanavong government has effected an agreement with other anti-French Lao factions and that both the former Free Laos now in the Vientiane Government and Lao guerrilla leaders throughout Laos are in contact with Souphanavong.
7. Viet Minh-supported Lao leaders under Souphanavong include the following:

Tao Sri Tonka	Minister without Portfolio; commander of all Lao forces under Souphanavong.
Chao Sukong	Former secretary to Prince Petcharat in the Free Lao Government in Bangkok.
Chao Phuy	Lives in Ban Bung Khan (Saphur Chaiburi, 103-55, 10-25); maintains liaison between Souphanavong and the Viet Minh in North Viet Nam, via a communications route running from Ban Bung Khan to Paksane. The Viet Minh contact post in Central Viet Nam is a seven day walk from Paksane.*
Tao Sae	Lives in Nongkhai; commands a guerrilla unit active in the area between Vientiane and Paksane.
Tao Rod	Lives in Nongkhai; acts as a liaison officer between the Vientiane Government and Souphanavong. He is also concerned with Lao political refugees in Thailand. He was formerly a judge in Vientiane.
Tao Huensak	Commands a Lao guerrilla unit of 71 men working with the Viet Minh, which operates along the Mekong River in the Nam Sang (102-04, 10-12)-Nam Thon (102-13, 10-05) sector. At present he is conducting a raiding mission in the vicinity of Vientiane. Formerly a sergeant in the French Army, Tao Huens received a commission in Souphanavong's forces. His name holds considerable terror for travelers in the Vientiane area.

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Viet Minh Intentions towards Laos

6. Lao politicians generally believe that both the Bao Dai Government and the Ho Chi Minh Government are attempting to gain control of Laos. They believe that at the Pau Conference, Bao Dai suggested to the French that Laos be incorporated with Viet Nam in a Vietnamese Union. The Laos generally believe that the Viet Minh also intends to incorporate Laos as a part of Viet Nam. The Viet Minh forces the inhabitants of each newly occupied area in Laos to study Vietnamese. They have also attempted to impose Vietnamese customs on the Lao-Thai inhabitants of North Viet Nam. The French also have understood the desirability of making these areas nationally conscious and for that reason created the autonomous state of the Thai Federation.
9. Viet Minh propaganda in Laos is centered around the inability of the Laos to free themselves from French rule without Viet Minh support. Convinced by this reasoning, the anti-French Laos have inevitably succumbed to Viet Minh control. The majority of the Lao population, however, feels that after the conclusion of the war, the Vietnamese will control Laos.

Viet Minh Arms Procurement

10. Viet Minh troops in Laos are equipped with American arms smuggled from Thailand, similar to those used by the Free Thai during World War II. Only a small number have been produced in their own factories. Arms procurement committees have been formed by Viet Minh agents in Nongkai, Udon, Sakon Nakorn and Ubon. The arms acquired through these committees are divided equally among the various Lao guerrilla units. An important arms purchasing center is a medical and photo shop in the Nongkai market called "Viet Ung," owned by Tran Van Phuc\*\*\*, one of the arms committee members. Tran Van Phuc is a leading member of the Viet Minh in Nongkai.
11. According to an informant who has worked as a commission agent in Viet Minh arms transactions, arms for Lao guerrilla units are bought from Thai barracks and from Thai Army deserters who sell their weapons for cash return. On occasion, arms dealers have boasted that they are military officials who have influence and access to stores of arms.
12. The Viet Minh is able to acquire replacement parts for arms from Bangkok, where a number of Chinese shops have the necessary equipment. These Chinese deal principally in rifle barrels. The Viet Minh also has several arms factories in northeast Thailand. Several iron casting and smelting shops have already been discovered by the police in isolated villages.

Viet Minh Financial Support

13. According to a Viet Minh arms purchasing agent in Nongkai, the Vietnamese in northeast Thailand are supporting the Viet Minh organization to the extent of approximately 1,000,000 baht\*\*\* per month. Half of this sum is spent for the purchase of arms and the other half for general expenses.

Chinese Communist Arms Support

14. According to a Lao who formerly traveled through Yunnan and Indochina attempting to secure Chinese support for the forces of Prince Souphanavong, Ho Chi Minh will never receive sufficient arms from Communist China to carry out a successful offensive. The Chinese Communists intend to move their troops directly into Indochina as they did into Korea. CHU Chia-pi\*\*\*\*, a key man in the Chinese Communist Army concerned with the situation in Indochina, is opposed to giving unlimited arms support to Ho Chi Minh. It appears that he would like to lead his own army into Indochina.

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15. Common gossip among Lao troops who have joined the Viet Minh forces in Laos is to the effect that if the United States supports the remnants of the 26 Chinese Nationalist Division on the Burma-Indochina border, the Chinese Communists will enter Indochina in support of Ho Chi Minh.

25X1A [REDACTED] Comment. This information was previously reported in [REDACTED] from the same source.

25X1A\* [REDACTED] Comment. Additional information on the positions of these individuals in the Souphanavong government in contained in [REDACTED]

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25X1A\* [REDACTED] Comment. [REDACTED] from a different source, reports that Viet Minh headquarters in Nongkhai is in a drugstore owned by Nguyen Duc Phat. This possibly refers to the same shop. The Tran Van Phuc reported here is probably not the same as the military advisor to the Viet Minh delegation in Bangkok.

25X1A\*\*\*\* [REDACTED] Comment. A more accurate estimate is probably 500,000 baht.

25X1A\*\*\*\*\* [REDACTED] Comment. For further information on CHU Chia-pi, who participated in the disarming of Japanese troops in Indochina at the end of World War II, [REDACTED] 25X1A contains biographical data on CHU.

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